

With the death of Lalita Pawar and Om Prakash, Hindi cinema lost two of its finest character actors. A tribute

# Rites of

**B**ORN in Indore in 1916 as Lalitabai Hanuman Prasad, Lalita Pawar started her career as a child artist. In those days she used her stage name, Ambu. She married stunt

film-maker, G P Pawar who directed most of her later silent and early sound films. Pawar's partner, Chandrarao Kadam usually played her hero in films like *Dairi Khajina*, *Jalta Jigar*, *Nek Dost* and

## Film writer Bunny Rueben remembers Lalita Pawar

**I** HAVE known Lalita Pawar for a very long time — she worked in my home production (the R K banner), *Shri 420*, and later with Raj Kapoor in *Anadi*. She was a sharp-tongued woman with a large heart, quite like her on-screen persona. She enjoyed life and loved people. She talked very freely and frankly — always a forthcoming person. There was no sham or artifice about her. She had a very long innings and a very good life. She moved to Pune a few years ago, perhaps, due to financial pressures.

Lalita Pawar had a rustic charm which came across very well on celluloid. She was very much a strong figure in Hindi cinema over several decades. And whether she played *Shri 420*'s lovable Lady *Kelewali*, *Anadi*'s Mrs D'Sa or the unsympathetic tyrant in films like *Mr & Mrs 55* she lent conviction to all her roles. It will be very difficult to forget her.





# passage

*Pyari Katar*. She herself produced one film — *Duniya Kyi Hai*.

In the early '40s she played lead roles opposite Nazir (*Rajkumari*, *Captain Kishori*), E Billimoria (*Nirali Duniya*), Trilok Kapoor (*Nari*). But she developed her best-known persona that of a vamp-like, scheming mother in *Ramshastri*, turning her slightly defective eye into her trademark. Her last appearance was in the Marathi film, *Limited Manuski* which was released last year.

(*Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*)

VETERAN character actor Om Prakash died in Mumbai, last week. His rite of passage was quiet and uneventful — a stark contrast to a six-decade-long career built on hamming and hawing. Om Prakash started his film career in 1935 and acted in nearly 250 films. A long way from a nobody earning a paltry Rs 25 per month to one of the most popular comic figures on

the silver screen. His characteristic Punjabi dash and natural talent for mimicry were, to a large extent, responsible for his success.

Born to a Punjabi-Hindu family based in Lahore, on December 19, 1919, Om Prakash joined All India Radio when he was just 18. It is said that he orated so well that listeners of rural and dramatic programmes soon came to associate his name with entertainment. But he was not satisfied with earning up to Rs 40 per month, and left AIR to act in films. The film *Dassi* earned him recognition and after *Dhamki* he was elevated to the Rs 350-per month bracket.

The exodus of Punjabi Hindus from Lahore in the post-Partition days brought Om Prakash to Mumbai, where he had to begin all over again. A role in *Lakhpatri*, 1948, turned the tables for this actor. It brought him new contracts and films like *Lahore*, *Char Din*, *Sabak*, *Sargam* and *Bahar*.

In 1950, he formed his own

company, Bakshi Brothers, and produced the film, *Khazana*. The saving grace of this film was Om Prakash's excellent portrayal of the dumb servant, Mangoo. He also directed *Bhaiyaji* and *Duniya Gol Hai* and produced and directed *Gateway of India*.

Some of his more memorable films include *Ab Dilli Dur Nahin*,

*Aasha*, *Chacha Zindabad*, *Dus Lakh*, *Padosan*, *Buddha Mil Gaya*, *Gol Maal*, *Aandhi* and *Chupke Chupke*. As Amitabh Bachchan's *daddu* in *Namak Halal* he once again proved his flair for the tragicomic. Om Prakash passed away at 78 after a long illness.

(All archival material and photographs: Subhash Chheda)

